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ABSTRACT

The Communication Experience Approach (CEA), a modification of the Language Experience Approach to teaching reading, involves the use of group activities designed to help functionally illiterate persons learn basic communication skills. This paper first discusses six distinct processes in the CEA: setting a specific purpose for communicating, expressing oneself by speaking, recording speech, reading what has been spoken, revising what has been read, and using the written product in a real situation. The paper notes that the process of skill development is integrated into each of the six processes. A sample instructional plan is then provided to show how the CEA might be used by a group of students in planning a telephone inquiry about a job advertisement. Finally, 16 examples of communication situations that lend themselves to the CEA are listed. (GW)

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The Communication Experience Approach to Learning Basic Skills

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The Communication Experience Approach to Learning Basic Skills

An Instructional Plan

The Communication Experience Approach (CEA) is an instructional plan designed to bring success in learning the basic communication skills to the functionally illiterate individual. The individual who cannot read, write, speak, or listen effectively in situations common to everyday living, such as reading a newspaper, responding in writing to a job offering, lodging a consumer grievance in person, or understanding the elements of persuasion in a television commercial may be considered as functioning below the level of literacy required for coping in a literate society.[1]

The CEA, a modification of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to teaching reading (Stauffer, 1970), recognizes that the functionally illiterate adult is aware, often painfully, of the social and emotional handicaps that are likely to result from inadequate basic communication skills. Unlike the LEA, the CEA responds to the individual's social needs as well as to his/her need for basic communication skills by incorporating personally important social purposes for communication into the instructional plan. In such a way, felt social needs are identified, met by the strengthening of communication skills, and, in turn, provide the basis for the literacy program. Like the LEA, by utilizing the student's own language, instruction in the basic communication skills serves to enhance the learner's self-concept, is received more attentively, and becomes more effective in accomplishing its communication objectives.[2]

The CEA involves six distinct processes and a seventh process which is integrated into each of the other six:

1. Purpose setting
2. Spoken language
3. Recording of speech
4. Reading
5. Revision
6. Use of written product
7. Skill development

It should be emphasized that in the CEA, the seventh process, skill development, is not a separate follow-up segment tacked on to the communication experience; the development of social, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills occurs through all phases of the instructional plan.

Students refine their skill in discussing, identifying, and expressing a purpose for communicating, in a group --- certainly an important social competency. The process of <u>setting a specific purpose</u> for communicating becomes not only the motivation for the next process, spoken language, but also the vehicle for developing social skill.

<u>Spoken language</u>, in turn, not only furnishes the basis for the production of written material, but also provides for its own development, that is, learning to express oneself in speech by speaking, and importantly, serves as a tool for facilitating social interaction.

The next process, <u>recording of speech</u>, similarly provides: one, a basis for later processes in the CEA, such as reading;

two, a vehicle for its own development, that is, writing skill, including such components as style and form and spelling (Allen, 1976); and three, a motivational goal for previous processes. Knowing speech will be written down usually engenders greater consciousness on the part of both students and teacher of what is spoken.

In the same fashion, reading what has been spoken takes advantage of the individual's language facility and usually results in reading that is more fluent, more comprehensible, and more rewarding to the student (Escoe, 1977). Reading in the CEA proceeds as an initial segment of an attempt to evaluate what has been written to meet a specific communication purpose. It emphasizes the opportunity to read written discourse, a procedure which may prove to be more successful in remedial and corrective reading instruction than activities in the presently popular isolated skills programs (Allington, 1977). Reinforcement of word recognition and comprehension skills may be a part of the reading step of CEA, and can include word banks and other techniques often used in LEA programs (Hall, 1976). Motivation for turning to supplementary reading materials, such as reference works, content area books, pamphlets, periodicals, and even novels, may arise from the student group's decision to refine and strengthen their message.

The process of revision is perhaps one of the most notable aspects of the CEA. Revising what has been read from what has been recorded from what has been spoken to meet an identified need offers many opportunities for skill development. Revision produced by a group of students involves re-reading, speaking,

and recording as well as the social skills necessary for group decision-making. What a purposeful way to accomplish the repetition that is often so important in reinforcing and developing fluency in those skills!

Using the written product in a real situation is the culminating process of the CEA; arranging for a job interview based upon a student-created script, for example, will complete the communication experience, and, of course, will have served as a motivating force throughout the instructional plan.

Sample Plan

The sample instructional plan offered below provides an example of how the CEA may be used:

1. Purpose setting: A group of five teenage students agree that a mutual concern is how to conduct a telephone inquiry for a job advertisement. They decide to consult the classified ad section of the newspaper, and choose a listing offering a part-time position as a painter's helper.

2. Spoken language: The students discuss the traits they would like to communicate over the phone: courtesy, confidence, dependability, willingness to learn, and so on. They talk about how to speak to the receptionist, how to bring up the matter of wages, and how to set up an appointment for a personal interview. They decide to practice the telephone inquiry.

3. Recording of speech: A group-dictated script of the proposed telephone call is recorded by the teacher on chart paper so all group members can read the record.

4. Reading: The teacher and the students read the script together, with individual students re-reading portions of it. (In other groups or in other situations, the teacher may read the material first to the students.)

5. Revision: Some of the students decide the message sounds too casual to make a good impression. They convince the others by re-reading aloud parts of the script. Portions are crossed out, rewritten, and added to. The group reads the material once again. A few minor changes are suggested and implemented, and the script is then read

in its entirety again. The words interview, applicant, and appointment are selected to be added to students' word banks. A hint about recognizing words with common suffixes is presented to the group by the teacher.

6. Use of written product: Using the script as a confidence-builder and guide, a student dials the number listed in the ad and requests a personal interview.

7. Skill development: Through setting a purpose for the communication experience, discussing means of achieving that purpose, recording spoken words, reading the recorded product, revising it, and using it, communication skills are developed and reinforced.

Examples of CEA Situations

Below are communication situations which may be suggested by students or may be presented to students to provide a stimulus for their own purpose setting. Scripts may be written for conversations, and letters may be produced for written communication.

Telling a friend that his cigarette smoke is irritating

Returning a package of spoiled meat to the supermarket

Answering a classified ad for a used car

Participating in a personal job interview

Taking a driver's road test

Attending a zoning hearing

Requesting brochures for a technical school

Dining out with a friend

Protesting an overlooked job promotion

Writing to the editor of a newspaper to comment on the school budget

Commending a chef on her pecan pie

Reporting a burglary

Publicizing a basement sale

Lodging a complaint about discourteous service in a department store

Organizing a community pride meeting

Requesting a copy of a birth certificate

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Footnotes

[1]A helpful exploration of the reading component of functional literacy may be found in Janet K. Carsetti's Literacy: Problems and solutions. Washington, D. C.: American Bar Association, 1975.

[2]The traditional Language Experience Approach (LEA) includes the following steps: speech, recording, reading, and skills development.